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India

A PLEA

FOR

A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF INDIA,

ADDRESSED TO THE

MINISTERS, ELDERS, DEACONS, AND PEOPLE,

OF THE VARIOUS PRESBYTERIAN BODIES IN INDIA;

BY

AN ELDER OF THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

That they all may be one—that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. John, xvii. 21.

Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. Philippians, iii. 15.

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A PLEA.

The Report of the Punjab Missionary Conference held at the close of 1862, which has lately been published, contains, among other deeply interesting papers, an Essay by the Rev. John Newton, on the subject of AN INDIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. That essay I would commend to the prayerful consideration of all in India who love the Lord Jesus Christ; for though, as the writer confesses, the time has not yet come for more decisive action, there are preparatory steps which can now be taken, and which may hereafter render a general union of all Christians, a more practicable measure. Among these preparatory steps, we may, I think, reckon an attempt to unite the various bodies, whose doctrines, discipline, and mode of worship, are essentially the same;—and it is with this view that I venture to bring before the Fathers and Brethren of our various Presbyterian bodies, a PLEA FOR A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF INDIA.

The reasons in favor of external union among Christians of all Churches, set forth in Mr. Newton's Essay, apply with equal force to an union between the different bodies of Presbyterians.* To which may be added that there are many

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* But if Christians, however separated by outward circumstances, are really one,—one in the spirit of the inner man, in attachment to the Saviour, in the Father's everlasting love, and in the hope of glory,—why not come together, and make their oneness doubly manifest, by dwelling harmoniously within one ecclesiastical enclosure? Why not *appear* to be what they are in *reality?* Does not the truth demand it? Does not the honour of their common Lord demand it? Would not Christian fellowship be promoted by it? Would not the Church, as an agency for good in the world, gain strength by it? Instead of the partizan cry, "I am of Paul! And I, of Apollos! and I, of Cephas! And I, of Christ!" how much more befitting--more lovely--more God-honouring, and Christ-glorifying, and Spirit-conciliating, would be that *manifest* oneness and sympathy, among the followers of Jesus, which must constrain the world to say,—"Behold, how these Christians love one another!" *Essay on An Indian Catholic Church: Punjab Missionary Conference Report, page* 300.

advantages peculiar to ourselves, which such an union would secure.

At present, from the small number of Congregations within anything like a reasonable distance, the formation of our superior courts, even of Presbyteries, is almost an impossibility;—or, the Presbytery becomes little more than a reproduction in another form of the Kirk-session. But the number of Presbyterian Congregations of different Communions, now existing within reasonable distances, would greatly facilitate the formation of Presbyteries, and tend to make them more realities than they now are;—and the formation of Presbyteries would naturally lead to the formation of a Synod—meeting once a year, and alternately in the bounds of the different Presidencies, by which means the office-bearers of the Church would be enabled to take counsel together, in a much more systematic way than is now possible.

A second advantage would be, that as a united body we should have greater weight in the discussion of those subjects affecting the Church at large, which are more and more, every year, being considered in such Conferences as that which lately met at Lahore—and in the action, which, as a Church, we might take for extending and strengthening our influence.

And there is a third manner in which our union might, I think, be productive of benefit. At present, in many Military Stations, there are no means of having services conducted for the Presbyterian Soldiers. It is evident, that there is much more likelihood of good being done, where services are conducted in the order to which the soldiers are accustomed, than by marching them to a service which they are unable to follow, and which not improbably in their childhood they were taught to look upon as unscriptural and unprofitable. And while we may reasonably hope that the appeal lately addressed to the Secretary of State for India, by the Ministers and People of the Church of Scotland, may result in the appointment of some additional Chaplains, it is not to be expected that there will be so many as will effectually provide

for the wants of all the important Military Stations. The Government will naturally say, "We provide one Church-of-"England Chaplain for a station containing perhaps a thou-"sand Churchmen: you cannot expect us to appoint a Pres-"byterian Chaplain where there are perhaps only 50 or 100 "Presbyterians." While we must admit the reasonableness of this, we may fairly ask that wherever there is a Presbyterian Missionary willing to take spiritual charge of the Presbyterian Soldiers, the same system should be adopted as prevails with reference to Roman Catholics, and an allowance made to the Missionary in proportion to the number of men, women, and children, that will form his charge. I believe that Government would at once do this, in the case of Missionaries of the Church of Scotland; for I know that on one occasion when both the Chaplains in Madras were absent on sick leave, the Missionaries performed the duties, and received certain allowances for so doing. But I think it doubtful whether they would at present do so in the case of Missionaries connected with other bodies. There could however be no objection made to any Missionaries belonging to a United Church, of which the Presbyterian Chaplains formed a part.

Taking then all these points into consideration, I consider that the formation of a United Presbyterian Church of India would be desirable:

1st. Because it is a duty which Christians owe to the Church and to the world, have a united outward organization, when they "are really one—one in the spirit of the "inner man, in attachment to the Saviour, in the Father's "everlasting love, and in the hope of glory:"*

2nd. Because it would facilitate the formation of Presbyteries; and, if needful hereafter, of a superior Ecclesiastical Court:

3rd. Because it would give increased weight to the Presbyterian element in India: and

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* Essay by Mr. Newton, above quoted.

4th. Because it might be instrumental in providing the means of grace for Presbyterian soldiers in the forms to which they are accustomed.

But is such a thing possible? Is there any hope that an attempt made to unite the different Presbyterian bodies in India would be successful? I think there is—and though I do not deny that difficulties lie in the way, I believe there is none of them that may not with perseverance be removed.

In the first place we are encouraged to hope in the possibility, by the events that have actually taken place elsewhere, especially among Presbyterians.

"In Ireland," Mr. Newton tells us, "two branches of the Presby-
"terian Church have been formally united:—a similar union has been
"projected in England:— the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland
"is the result of a like union in that country:—two different branch-
"es of the Protestant Church in France have recently been fused in-
"to one:—three members of the Presbyterian family in Australia have
"been organically united:—between two of the same branches of the
"Church, a union has just been effected in Canada:—the Associate and
"Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches in the United States, have
"lately became one:—the first step towards a re-union has been taken,
"within the last year, by the two principal bodies of Presbyterians in
"America":—&c. &c.

To these may be added the fusion of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland into the Free Church, and the steps which are now being taken, and with every prospect of success, for the union of the Free and United Presbyterian Churches in Scotland and England."

In the second place, there are no differences among ourselves with respect to doctrine, discipline, or forms of service; so that a member of one of the Scottish Churches, worshipping in a congregation connected with the American Missions, would only discover the difference from the use of the Hymn-book, in place of the accustomed Psalms and Paraphrases. And practically those differences which still unhappily make an union between the Established and the other Presbyterian Churches of Scotland an impossibility, need be no hindrance here, as they have been none in Australia. The difficul-

ties therefore which lie in the way, arise solely from the connection of our ministers and congregations with the different ecclesiastical bodies in Scotland and in America. Let us see then what these are, and whether there is anything in them which renders them insuperable.

The Presbyterian Ministers in this country consist of three classes:—First, Chaplains on the regular ecclesiastical establishment:—Second, Military Chaplains attached to particular Regiments, and connected with India only so long as these Regiments remain here.—Third, Missionaries of various bodies, supported by the Churches in Scotland and America. There are also, I believe, one or two Ministers, settled as Pastors of congregations, but supported partly by the Church at home, whom I include in the third list. The first apparent difficulty will be that the Chaplains must be Ministers of the Established Church of Scotland. But this difficulty I think will be more apparent than real, for the appointments would still continue to be made from the Established Church ; and I am persuaded that the Indian Government would offer no opposition to their Chaplains forming any ecclesiastical organization, which would not interfere with their duties as Military Chaplains. Indeed at present an ecclesiastical organization does exist, and Government, in its dealings with the Presbyterian Chaplains, simply ignore it. They profess, and rightly profess, to have nothing to do with Kirk-sessions and Presbyteries; which may be, and often are, in part composed of persons in no way connected with Government. Their intercourse is conducted through the Senior Chaplain, and the same course would continue to be followed. Some question might perhaps hereafter arise regarding the ecclesiastical functions which Ministers of the Church of Scotland are now by law competent to perform—such, for instance, as marriages ; about which an act was passed a few years ago. But should any snch difficulties arise, I have no doubt that a short declaratory act of the Council of the Governor General would be passed to remove them:—at all events the Ministers of the Church of Scotland would not lose the powers they now pos-

sess by law, during their connection with the Presbyterian Church of India, even if it should be found impossible to have these powers extended to all the ministers of the amalgamated Church. If therefore the Established Church of Scotland recognize the Church of India, as she has recognized the United Church in Australia, I see no other difficulty that need arise in the case of the Chaplains.

There might however be difficulties in connection with Missionaries, who are supported by different Churches in Scotland and America. It might be urged that there would be less disposition on the part of the members of these Churches, to support Missionaries who would in some respect be separated from them. But in reality there would be no such separation; for in such matters as the locating of Missionaries, and prescribing the rules by which their work was to be regulated, the authority of the Home Mission Boards would remain unaltered. Nor would any change take place in respect of the property in churches, mission houses, school houses &c. If it were found necessary which in most cases I believe it would not be, to make any alterations, the rights of the respective Churches to which the buildings originally belonged would of course be strictly reserved in the new title-deeds.

On a review of all circumstances I am confirmed in the view which has for some time been pressing itself on me, and which I know is entertained by other Presbyterians in India, that the advantages of a union would be great, and that the difficulties in the way of it are by no means insurmountable. I have done all that circumstances will at present permit me to do in thus bringing the subject forward. I leave it in the hands of the Fathers and Brethren of the Churches, earnestly praying that the Master may dispose the hearts of His servants to do in this matter what may be most for His glory, and for the good of His Church in India.